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Piano Series

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A Scientific Basis for the Granting of School Credit for Music Study

POST GRADUATE DIVISION
(GRADE FIVE)

CHAPTER XIII

PREPARED BY THE EDITORIAL STAFF OF THE

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XIII
THE IDEALIZED ETUDE

§1. The Etudes which were composed earlier than those of Chopin were intended solely to supply needed exercise in preparation for the playing of certain pieces. The method then in vogue entailed merely the taking of some difficult technical passages, perhaps from some particular work, and building upon it a series of passages of progressive difficulty. In this way the student was able more quickly to master a piece which abounded in this particular difficulty. These purely utilitarian studies were often made more interesting to the student by confining them within some musical form, such as the Song Form or the Rondo, though in only a very few instances were such studies of any musical value, except as preparatory technical studies.

There were, of course, in such Etudes few opportunities for the exercise of any other element of musicianship than the purely technical. Therefore after the student had mastered the mechanical difficulties of the study it became of no further use to him. The time spent upon it resulted only in the benefit it gave through serving as a preparation for something else. Economy of time and the element of efficiency were not then thought of as much as they now are. It is to be regretted that Chopin did not also write other and easier Etudes for the earlier years of music study.

But in the Etudes Chopin composed he was far in advance of the epoch in which he lived. He preceded his time in that he saw the necessity for conserving to the fullest extent the expenditure of effort, through combining elements of permanent musical value with those of passing or utilitarian worth. He was an "efficiency expert" in music study, in that he was not content to consider the technical element alone. In consequence, he gives us Etudes which not only contain problems for the fingers, but also embrace within them all the elements of musicianship, as well. Furthermore, at the conclusion of the study necessary to play one of these Etudes, the student has not only all the benefits resulting from the mastery of a study in technic, but he also has enlarged his repertoire by adding to it a recital piece. In his Etudes, Chopin left untouched scarcely a mood or color, at the same time exhausting the mechanical problems of the piano technic of his day. We therefore may well look upon the Chopin ETUDES as studies in musicianship rather than studies only in technic. They were not written as preparatory studies to other pieces; they are the pieces themselves.

ETUDE

Op. 25, No. 6

[MUSIC ON PAGE FIVE]

FREDERIC FRANCOIS CHOPIN

POLAND: 1809-1849

§2. This Etude ranks as one of the finest of all Etudes in Double Thirds. Its performance requires a perfect *legato* and the greatest dynamic control, especially in the finger tips. Obviously a loose forearm is a requisite condition if one would secure the greatest value from its practice. In acquiring the necessary technical facility, time and energy may be saved by practising the groups of *sixteenth* notes with shifted accents—that is, with various placings of dynamic accents—beginning first with the accent on the second of the *sixteenth* notes, thus making it the first of a group of four tones, and so on; then on the third tone, then on the fourth; also in Triplets, then in Sextolets.

While the *tempo* is fast, the tone must be susceptible to many shadings. In this, however, the student must follow the dictates of feeling rather than deliberate thinking. An academic rendition of this Etude would be altogether inappropriate. There should be no *rubato,* unless it be of the most subtle kind, and—in the words of Chopin himself—"like unto the flame of a candle, gently blown upon."

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ETUDE — FREDERIC FRANCOIS CHOPIN

Op. 25, No. 8 [MUSIC ON PAGE ELEVEN] POLAND: 1809-1849

§3. As has been said, the Etudes of Chopin, published between the years 1833 and 1837, opened up an entirely new field of technic and expression. They virtually proclaimed their author the founder of another epoch in piano playing.

To the observing student it is at once evident that these Etudes may be divided into two general groups, those in which the poetic content overshadows the technical elements, and those in which virtuosity seems the principal aim of the composer.

This Etude deals with the subject of Double Sixths—a form of technic to which Clementi, Cramer, Czerny and other Etude writers had previously paid considerable attention. Chopin, however, treats his subject quite differently from any of his predecessors. Double Sixths are no longer a pure mechanical problem, for with him they have become a means of musical expression. Although the *virtuoso* element is plainly evident, in this as in most of the Chopin Etudes, it is subordinated to the poetic. Hans von Bülow characterized this Etude as "the indispensable" and recommended that the pianist about to give a recital should play it over six times in succession before going on the platform.

Only if possessed of hands that are sufficiently well-developed should one attempt this Etude. Much work with each hand alone, and careful attention to a good *legato,* in the upper voice of the parallel Sixths, should bring excellent results. The necessity for this *legato* is more urgent in the upper voice than in the lower. Both voices should sound *legato,* of course, but if small hands have difficulty in attaining this they may practise the upper voice *legato* and the lower *staccato,* to avoid undue strain on the wrist. Another expedient, useful for all students, is to study the Piece in groups—first of three notes, then six, then by entire measures—mastering it by practising in units which gradually become larger until the whole Etude can be played without interruption. Of much interest is also the passage of consecutive Fifths (19-20), which appear between the lower tones of the right-hand part and the upper tone of the left-hand part. The effect here produced is most striking and possesses none of the objectionable qualities which are usually the result of such progressions.

Although this Etude is more technical than otherwise, it is nevertheless infused with much of the lyric charm which characterizes all works of Chopin. After the technical elements have been mastered by the student, he should then look well to the interpretative side of the work.

ETUDE — ANTON STEPANOVITCH ARENSKY

F-SHARP MAJOR, Op. 36, No. 15 [MUSIC ON PAGE FOURTEEN] RUSSIA: 1862-1906

§4. In this brilliant Study very rapid scale passages in unequal groupings in one hand provide attractive embellishment to a fully harmonized singing melody in the other hand. Through the first *period,* which is repeated, the embellishment is in the right hand; during the second *period* the order is reversed, the left hand takes up the ornamental passages, while the right plays the melodic chords with a full, sustained effect. Unless the text is faithfully followed in the matter of *crescendo* and *diminuendo* markings, accents and special dynamic indications, the Etude will sound dry and mechanical instead of musical.

The opening chord must be quickly but lightly *arpeggiated* in reaching up to the first tone of the melody, to be played with a full singing tone. This can be done only with pressure, avoiding any semblance of stroke. The last measure of the *period* (8) must diminish gracefully and end quite softly, with the last chord rolled quickly and lightly.

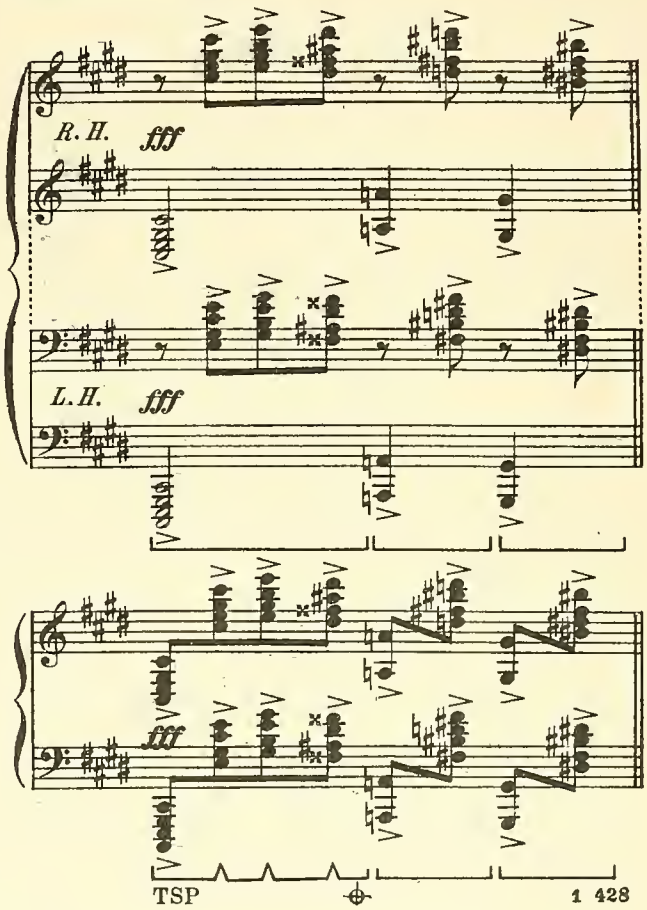
By contrast the next *period* (17) opens with considerable vigor; the left-hand part is to be played brilliantly, yet with ease. To achieve this a great deal of slow practice with the left hand alone is necessary. The fingering given, while not the easiest to learn, is calculated eventually to assure security and clarity. The regularity of the movement is

interrupted after six measures (15) by a rapid upward rush in the left hand, followed by wide skips to reach the Octaves in the Bass. This passage calls for great rhythmic strength. The alternating Octave passage in contrary motion (16) must ascend with a very emphatic *crescendo*. The Octaves must flow along as a single and connected phrase rather than a series of individually articulated tones. The last three measures of the *period* (23) call for a decided *ritardando,* and the tone color of the chords here should be markedly contrasted. The dynamics of the last eight measures of the Etude require special attention. The long, unaccompanied upward passage (23) in the right hand should taper off with a graceful *diminuendo,* and a slight *ritardando* at the end. The chord melody in the left hand must sing with full tone, but still subdued (*mezzo forte*) and diminishing quite perceptibly. The student is advised to study the left hand part alone until it can be played without hesitation. Although most of the left hand part appears fairly simple, this should be done in order to gain command of the song-like style and full control of the pedal. After this it will be a comparatively easy matter to superimpose the scale passages in the right hand.

It is advisable that the last three measures should begin more softly than before, and the following scale passage should diminish quickly to *ultra-pianissimo*. The final passage is extremely delicate, but still brilliant in tone quality, and ends in a mere whisper. The *una corda* or "soft" Pedal should be used for the last five measures.

Notation often renders it difficult for the student to distinguish between melody and accompaniment. In general there are two quite distinct methods of notation used for piano compositions. These result from two different viewpoints, one which recognizes the individuality and continuity of separate voice leadings, the other which takes more literally into account the mechanism of the piano. That is, the former represents all voices in all parts of a measure by notes which show to the eye the continuance of the voices, even when the hands must leave the keys to play other tones, while the latter merely notates the tone to be played just so long as the hands remain upon those keys, and while the hands are moved to other positions the Damper Pedal is used to sustain the tones so notated.

Illustration No. 1



Of course the former method of notation requires the same use of the Damper Pedal, but it has the advantage of conveying to the eye the continuance of the voices, leaving no doubt as to correct interpretation.

In Illustration No. 1 the two methods of notation are shown. The first example is to be preferred because it notates the actual length of time that each tone is to sound. The lowest voice of either hand must play a sustained melody which is the principal *motive* of the composition, and while the hands each move to the higher pitched accompanying figures the Damper Pedal sustains these tones.

The second example shows the same tones notated with respect to the position the hands must at all times occupy, but it does not indicate, except by the pedal markings, the continuance of the tones of the lower voiced *motive*.

In a passage of this kind the use of the Pedal is very important. What has been called "syncopated pedaling" should be employed; that is, the Damper pedal is to be depressed immediately AFTER the note to be sustained has been played. This results in giving the melody and Bass notes a more resonant tone.

Many similar uses of three or four staves are encountered in the works of various composers, as in "To a Water Lily," by MacDowell, and in the ETUDE "Un Sospiro," by Liszt.

Of the technical theories on which Chopin based his own teaching, the following exposition by one of his pupils will be of enlightening interest:

Chopin considered the first requisite for a good touch to be a good position of the hand, a matter about which he was extremely particular. Though there were some remarkable virtuosi at that time, the methods employed in teaching hardly approached the perfection of the present day; and Chopin outstripped the then existing German school. He prepared the hand with infinite care before permitting it to reproduce musical ideas. To give the hand a position at once advantageous and graceful—two qualities which in his estimation always went together—he caused it to be thrown lightly on the keyboard in such a manner that the five fingers rested on the notes *E*, *F*♯, *G*♯, *A*♯ and *B*. This he considered to be the normal position. Then without change of position, the hand was required to play exercises calculated to insure the independence and equality of the fingers.

He almost always instructed the pupil to commence these exercises playing each note *staccato*. This *staccato* he effected by a free movement of the wrist as a means of counteracting heaviness and clumsiness, the hand so held over the keys that the teacher by placing his own hand under the wrists of the pupil would feel scarcely any pressure. This kind of exercise was also intended to be conducive of an equality of power in the fingers and to counteract quickly the natural inferiority of the fourth and fifth fingers. A second set of exercises consisted of a *legato staccato*, or heavy *staccato*, in which the finger remains somewhat longer on the key. Then followed what he called the true *slurred* manner of modifying the *legato staccato*, making it an accented *legato*. Next he used a *legato* executed with the fingers raised considerably above the keyboard; and finally, the *legato* performed *ad lib.*, with a movement of the fingers more or less marked, modifying at pleasure the power from *ff* to *pp*, and the movement from Andante to Prestissimo.

These were the nrst exercises. The next series was for the purpose of preserving the even and tranquil position of the hand during the passage of the thumb in scales and *arpeggios*, a question much controverted, and wherein he was often in disagreement with the generally received opinion. It is known that with nearly all great *virtuosi* the elbow rests near the body as much as possible, and the passage of the thumb in scales and *arpeggios* takes place insensibly. With the logical method of Chopin, it is ordinarily impossible at first to avoid moving the elbow, or turning the hand somewhat, at the moment of the passage of the thumb, but from the very first lesson, Chopin insisted upon the hand's retention of its position; he preferred that the notes should at first be disconnected, rather than that the hand should alter its normal position. He required that all exercises and scales be played *staccato* at first, without troubling about the passage of the thumb. Taking it that in each scale the hand has two fundamental positions, of alternately three and four fingers, his pupils commenced with the scale of *B major* for the right hand and of *Db major* for the left hand.

By this *staccato* exercise the hand was rendered familiar with the successive positions; then by the various steps of *legato staccato*, accentuated *staccato*, etc., the pupil reached the point when, raising the fingers high, the thumb, by the action of the muscles was passed along, the hand still retaining its horizontal position. The hand was thus prepared for the more difficult scales, and for *arpeggio* passages, in which the wide intervals were eventually reached without effort and without greatly raising the fingers.

These exercises explain how Chopin executed his very difficult accompaniments consisting of notes at great distances apart. They also explain those fingerings—so original that they shocked the old pianists—the object of which is to keep the hand in its proper position, even by passing the second or third finger over the fourth, as in the chromatic scales with the second, third, and fourth fingers, such as are found in the *Study*, Op. 10, No. 2, and in other places.

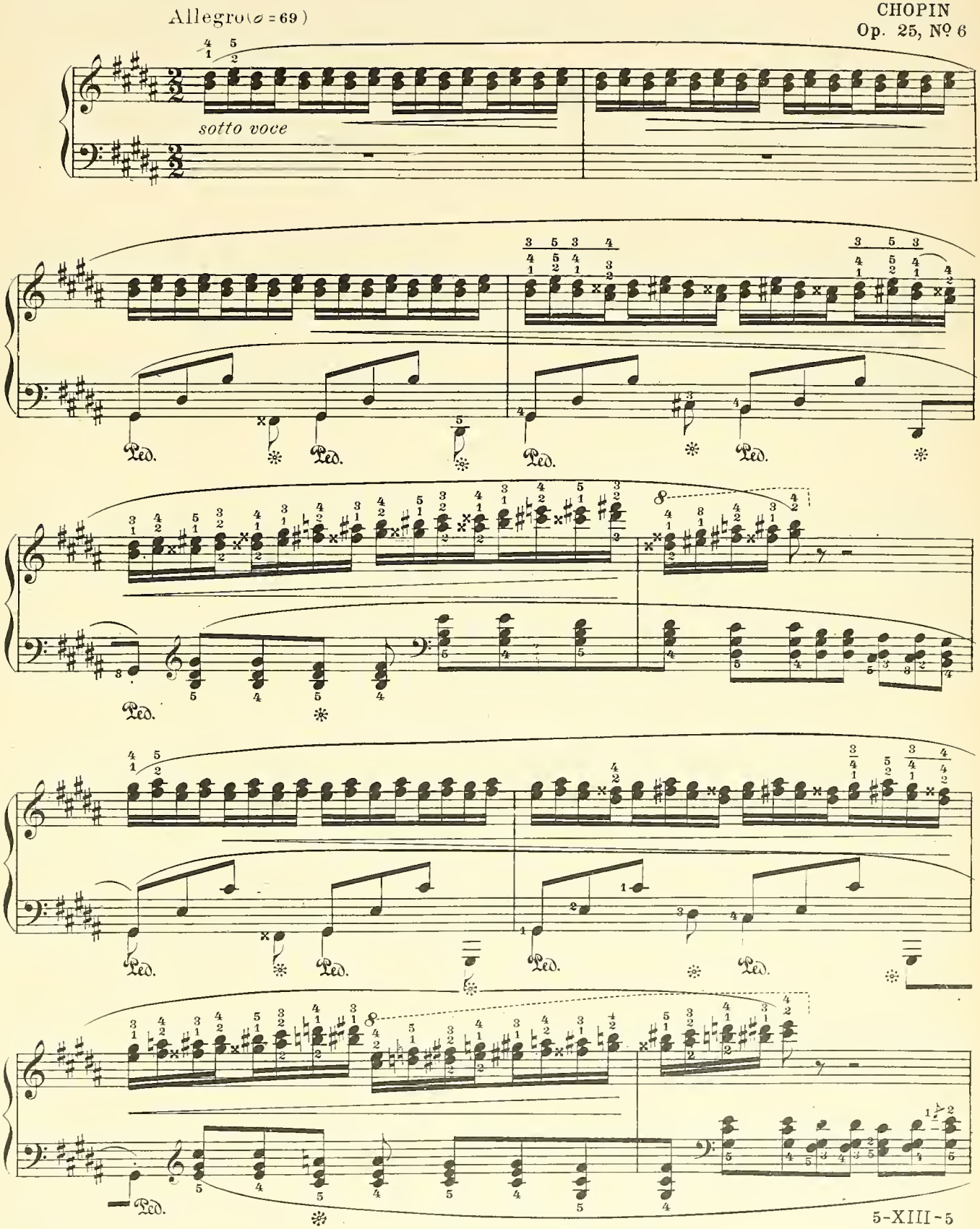
Kalkbrenner, an excellent pianist, but a partisan of the old school, was quite horrified at this unceremonious innovation; and admitting that Chopin had "a kind of talent," advised him to follow his (Kalkbrenner's) instructions for three years at least, in order to correct his defective fingering.

ETUDE

G-SHARP MINOR

Edited by
Guy Bevier Williams

CHOPIN
Op. 25, Nº 6



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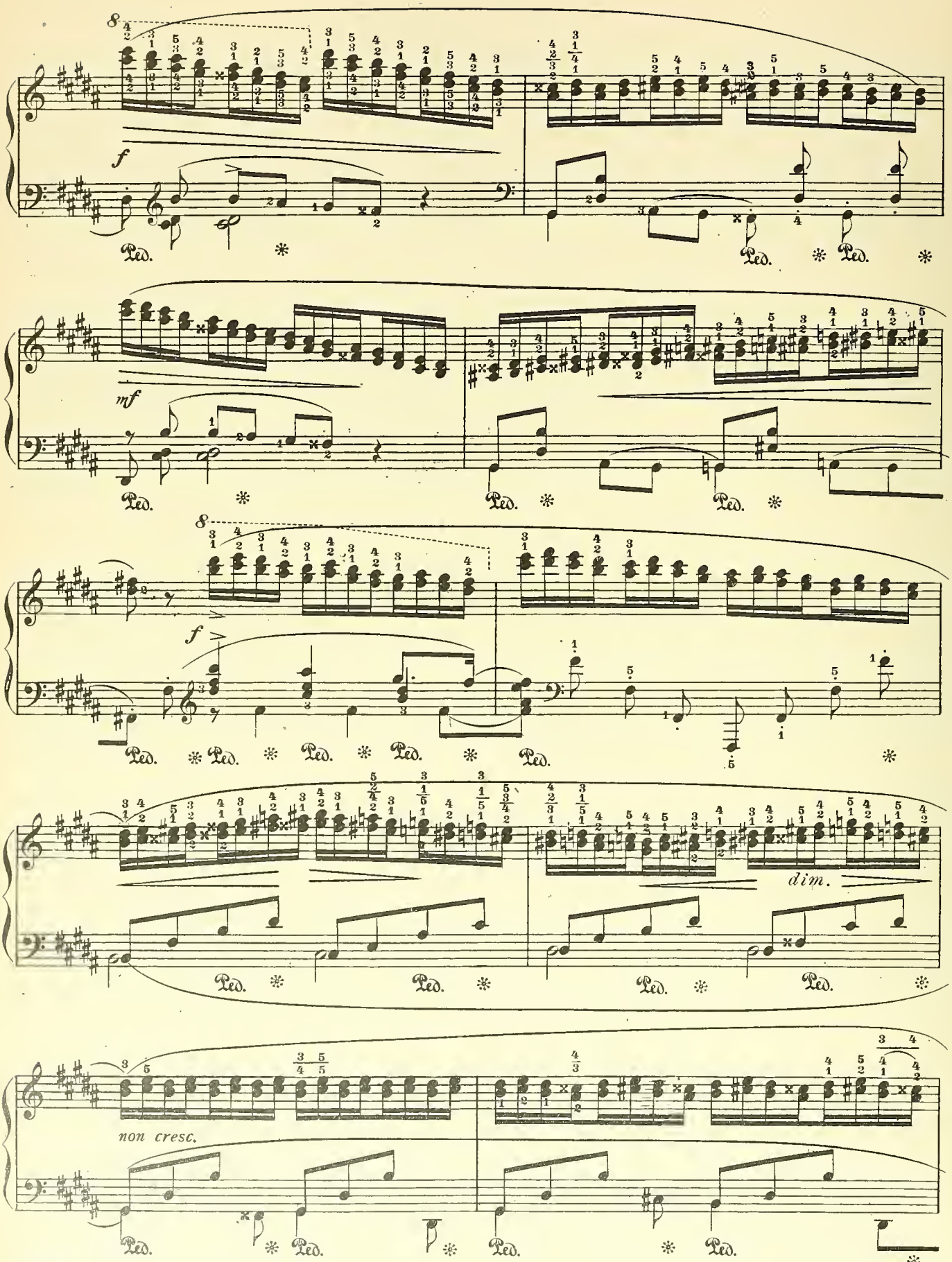
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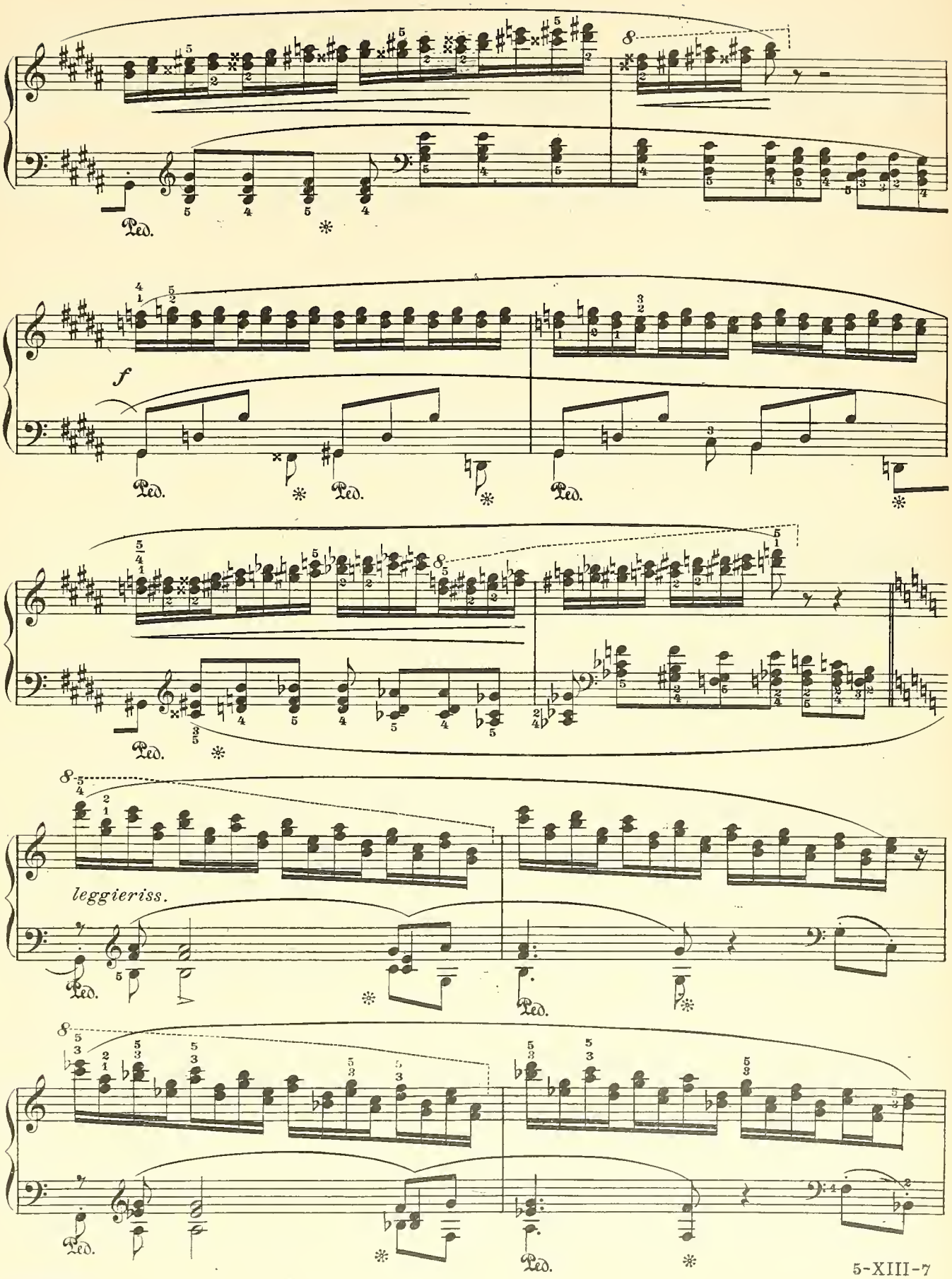
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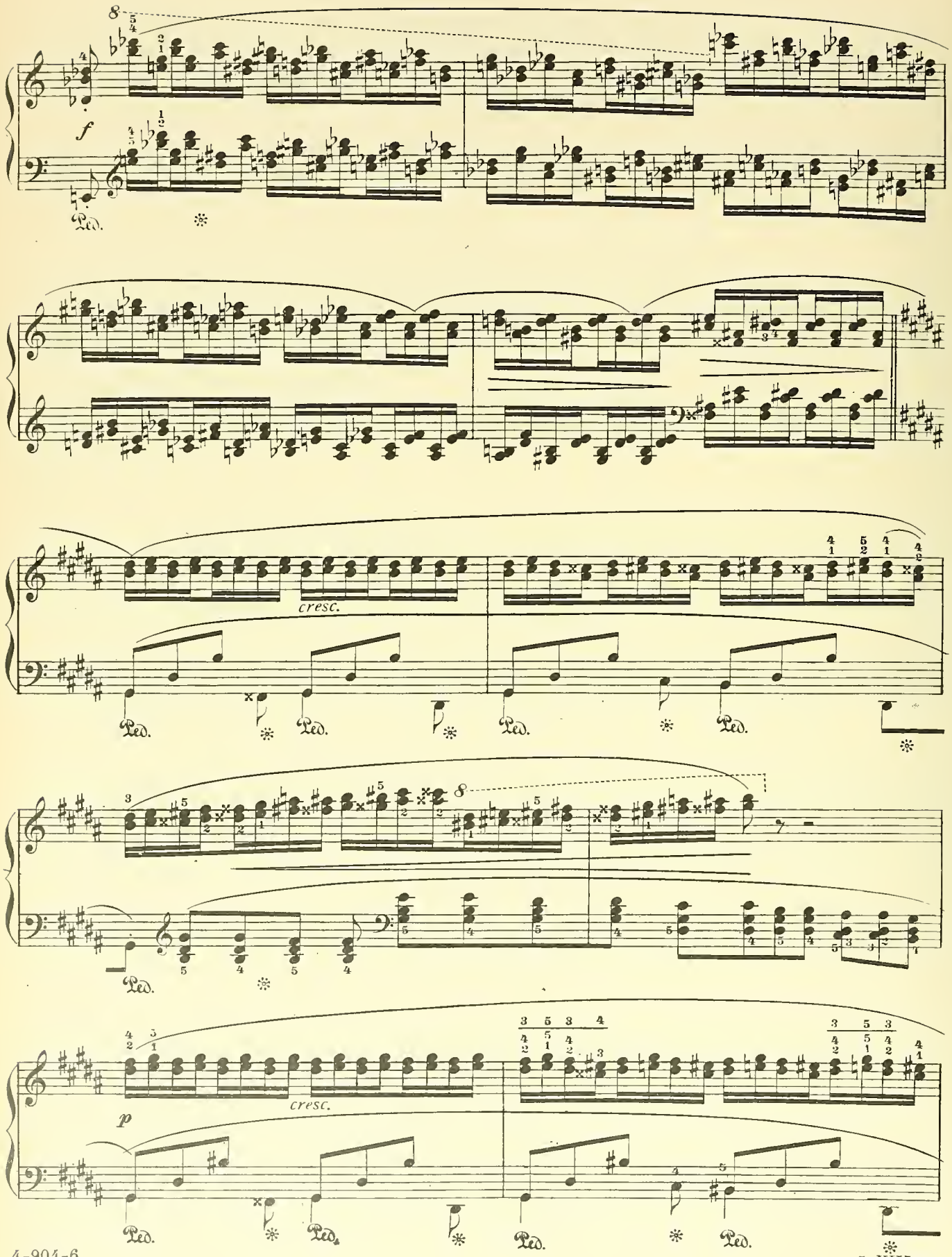
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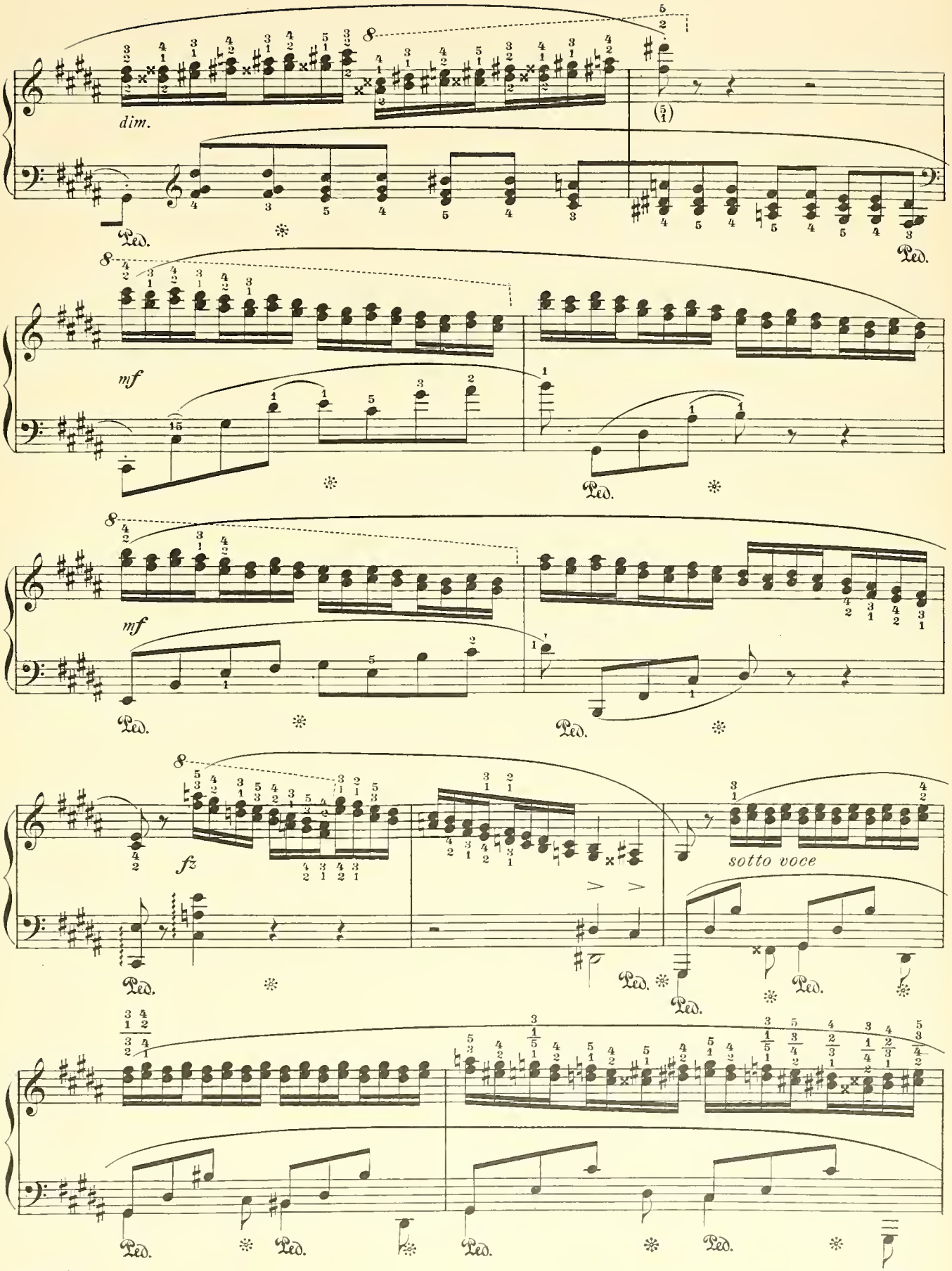
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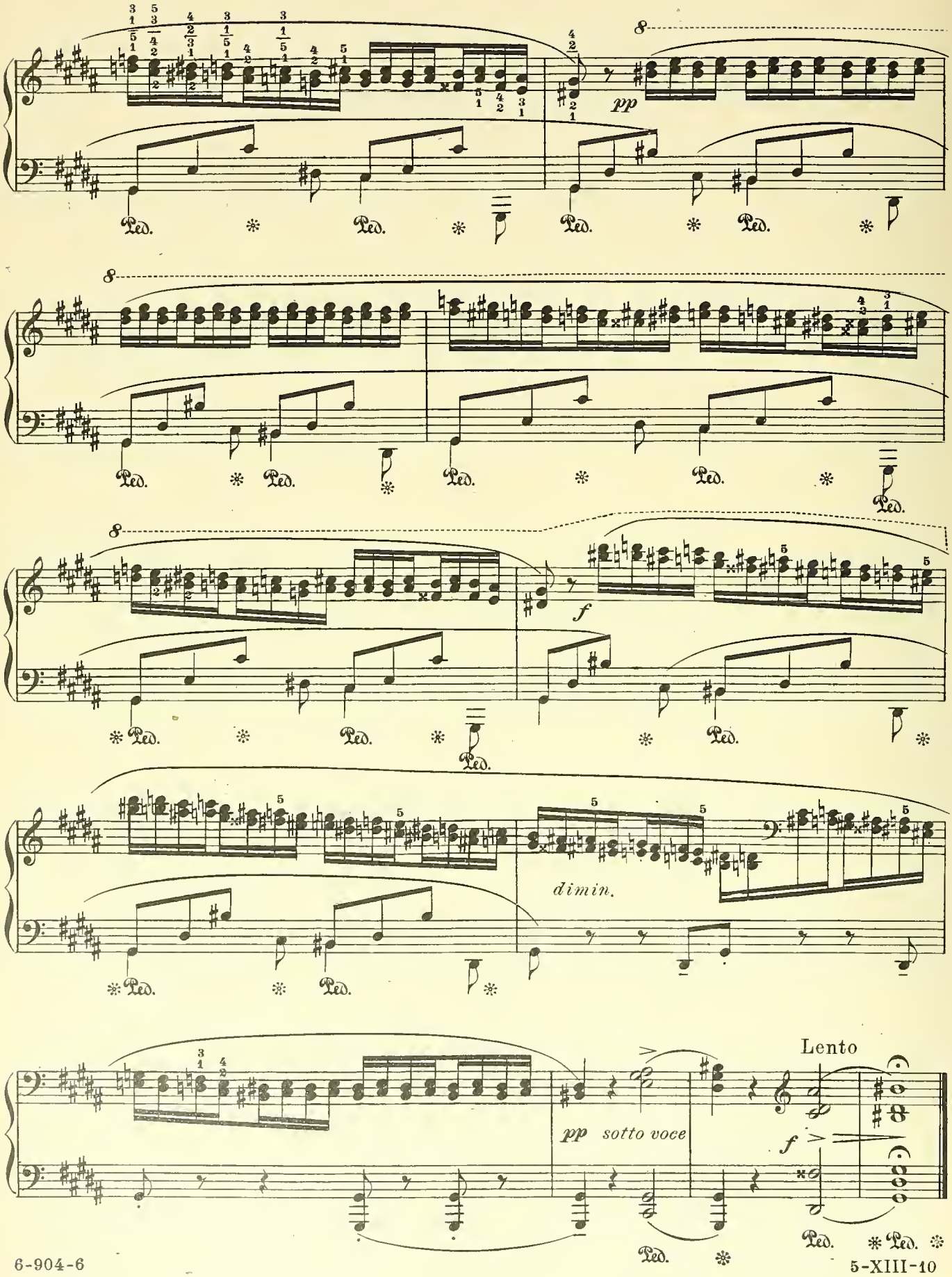
pp
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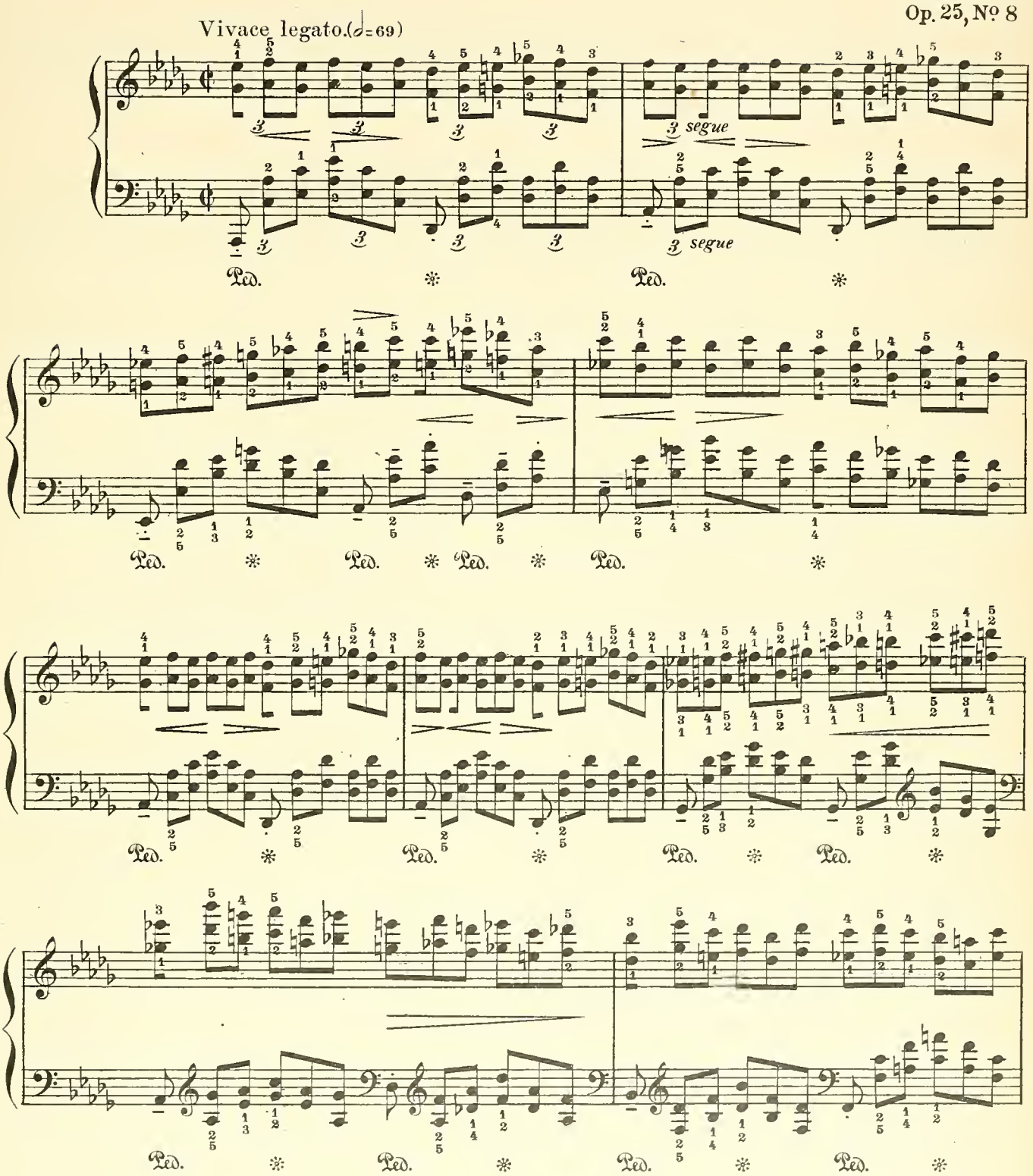
ETUDE

D-FLAT MAJOR

Edited by
Frederick Schweiker

Fr. CHOPIN
Op. 25, No 8



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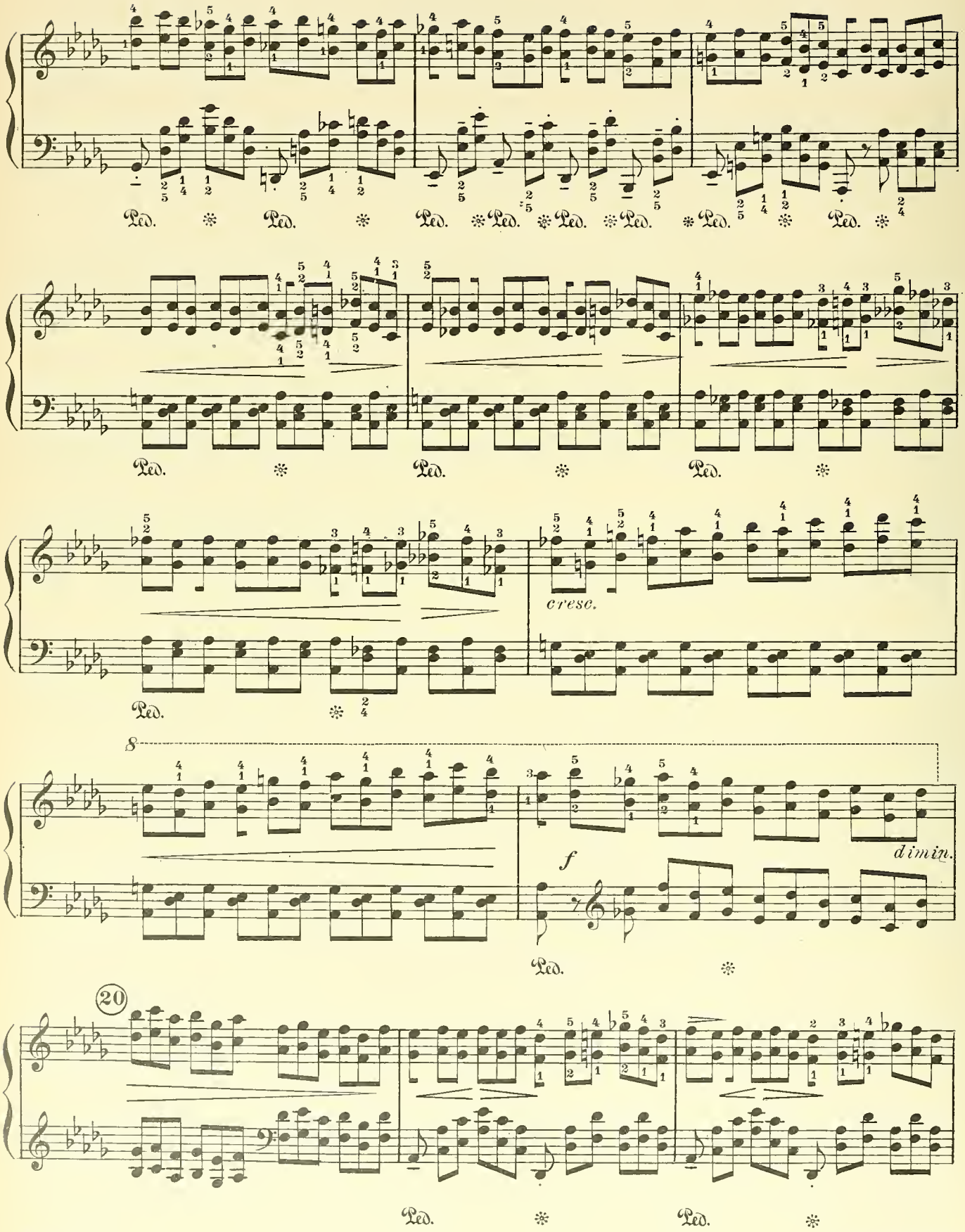
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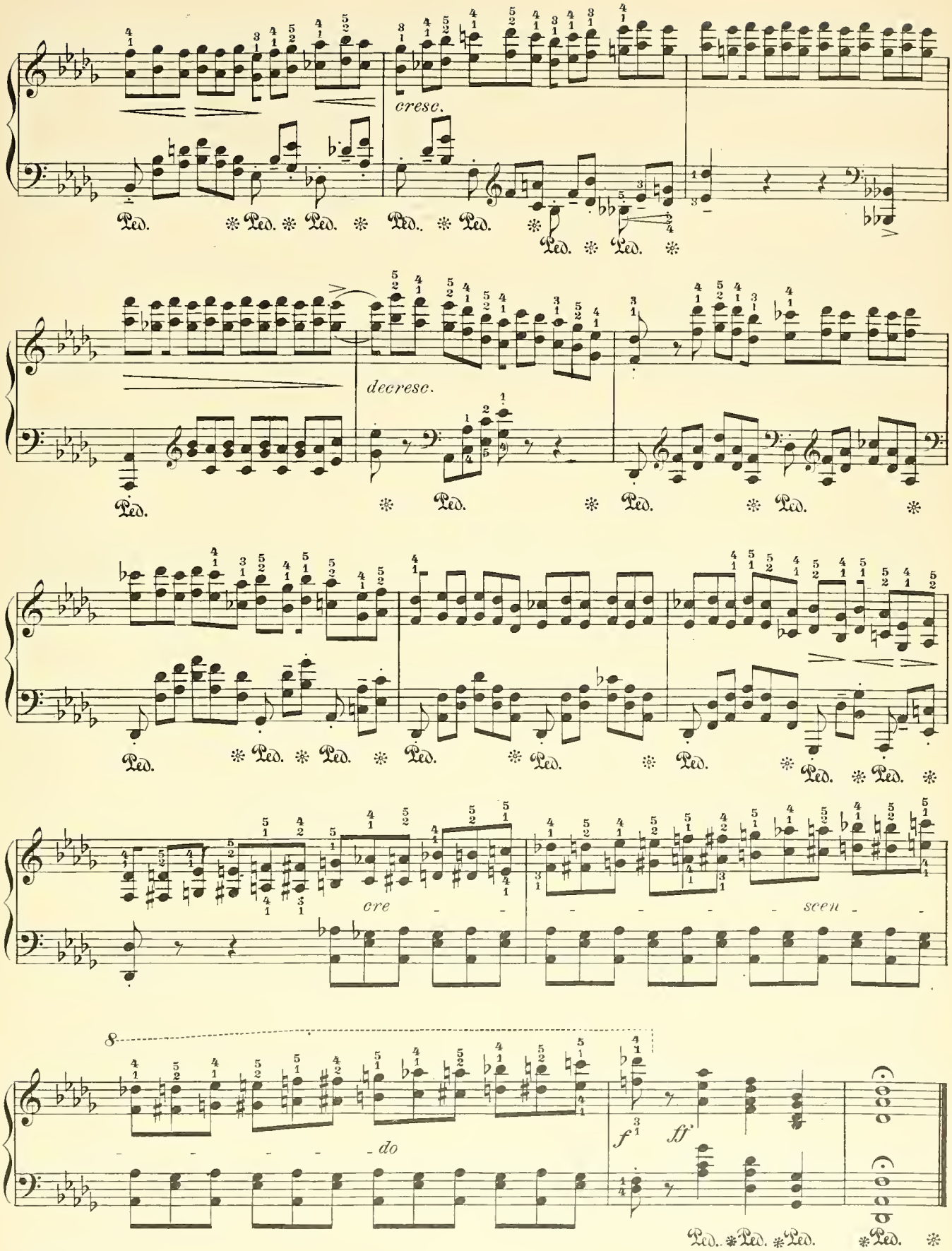
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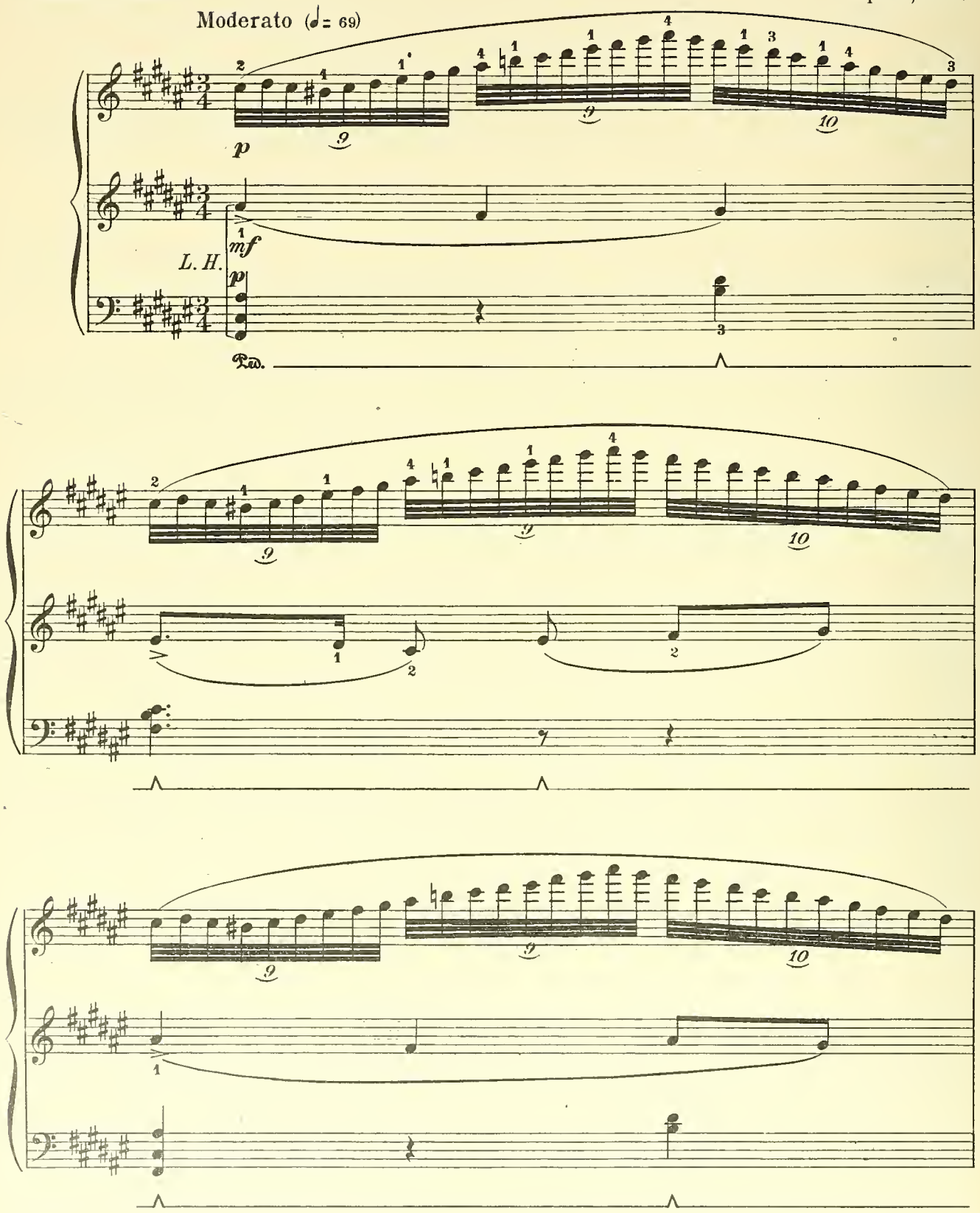
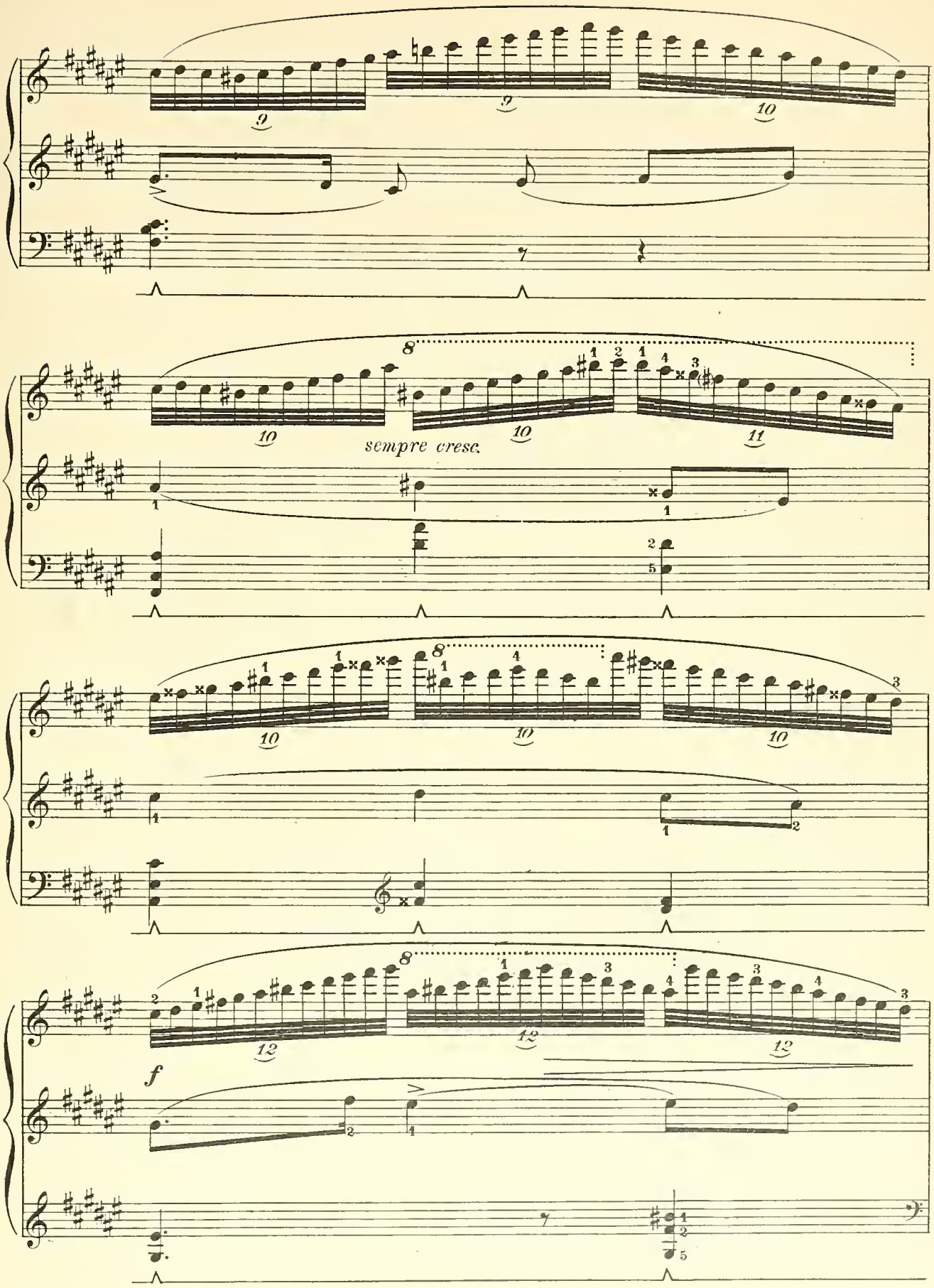
ETUDE

F-SHARP MINOR

Edited by
Charles Denneé

A. ARENSKY
Op. 36, No. 13

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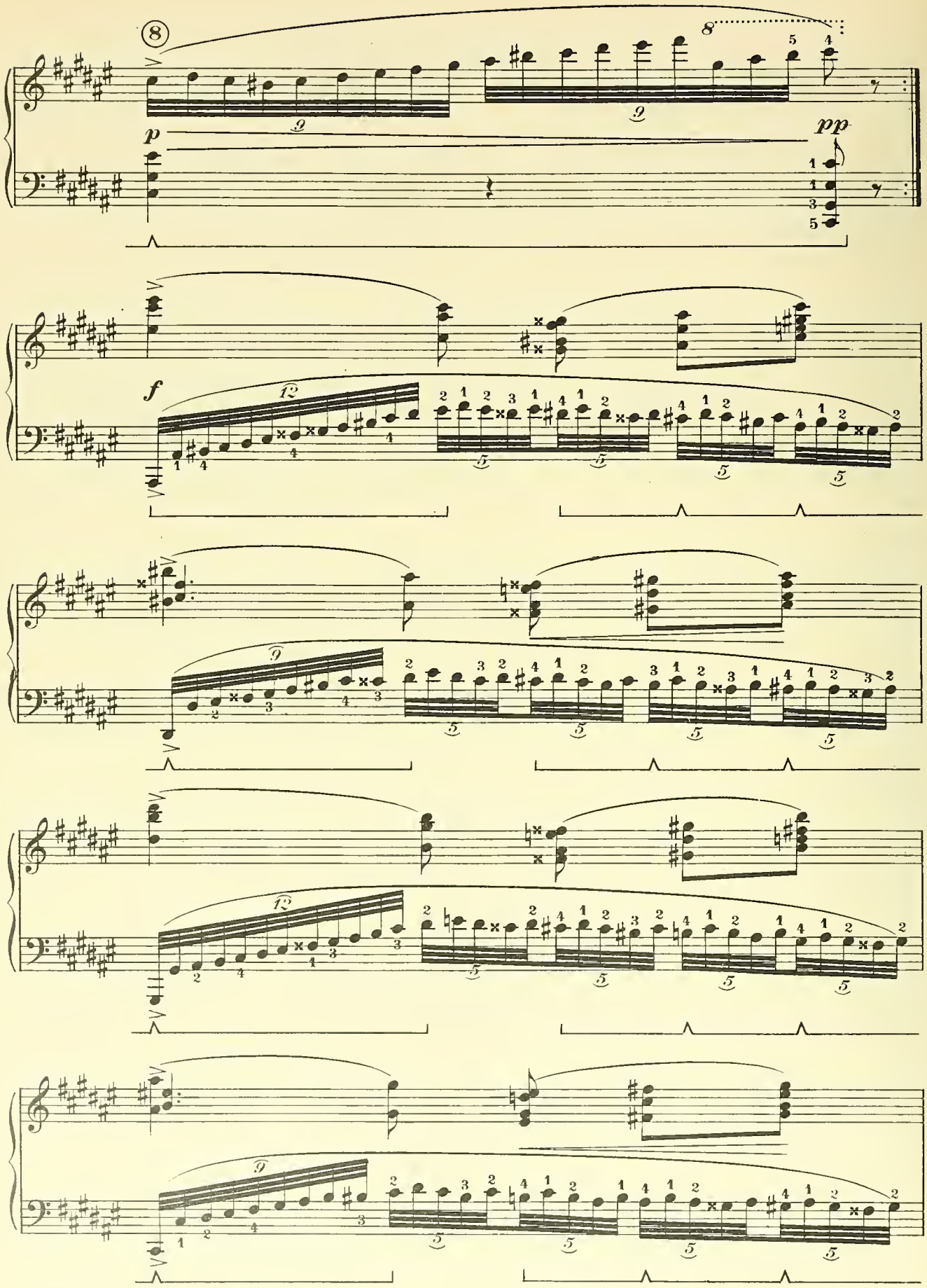
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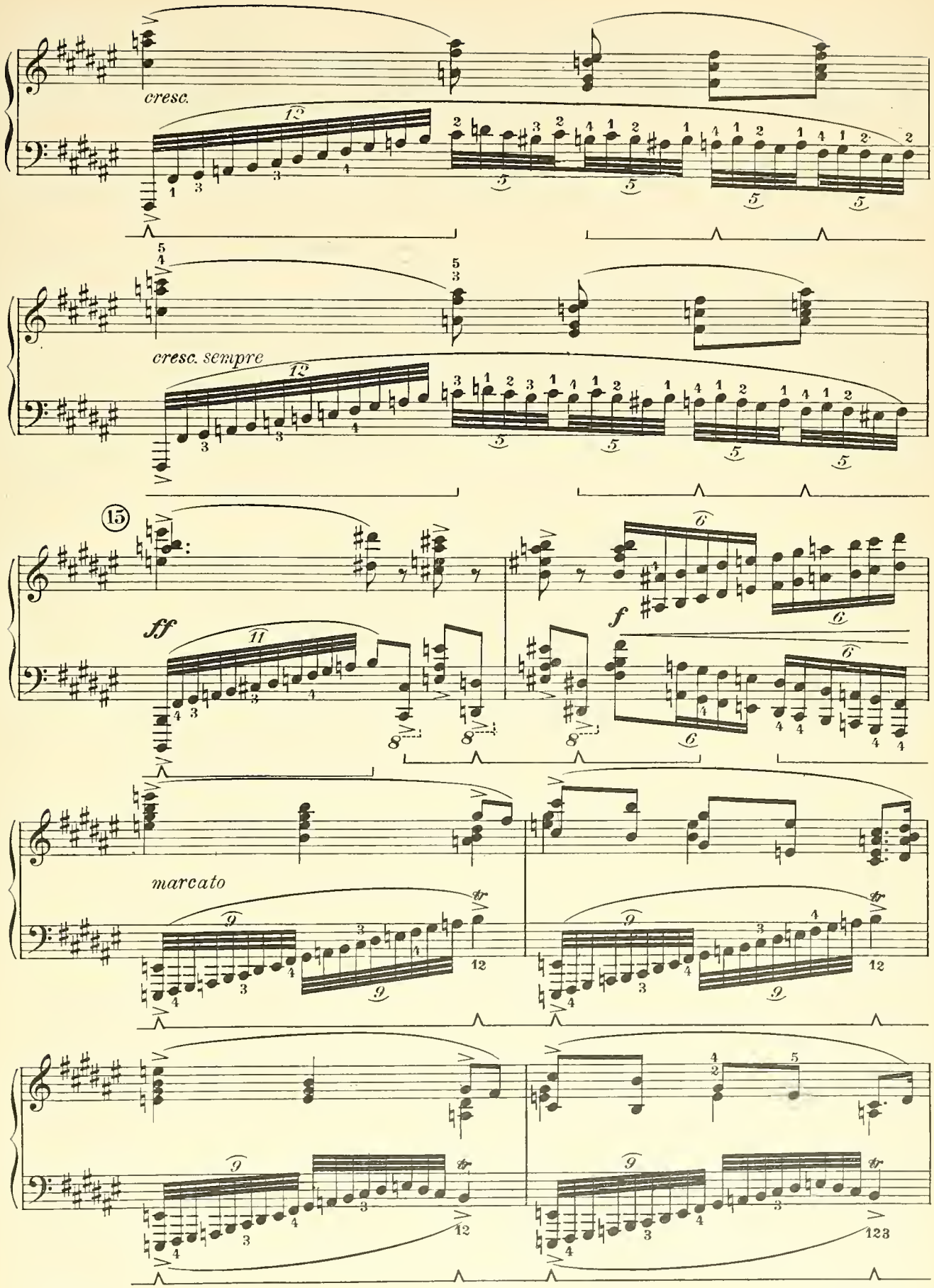
cresc.
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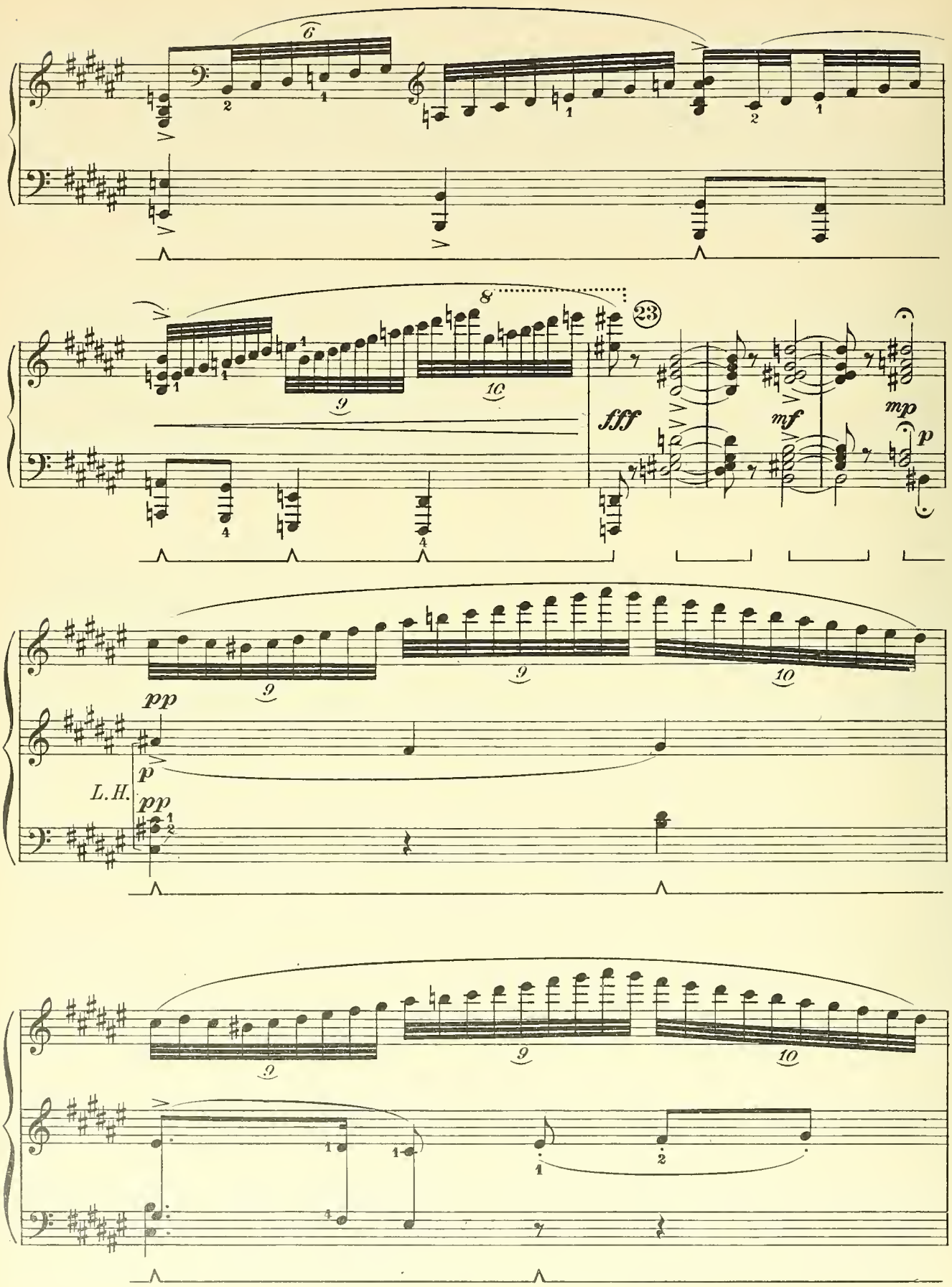
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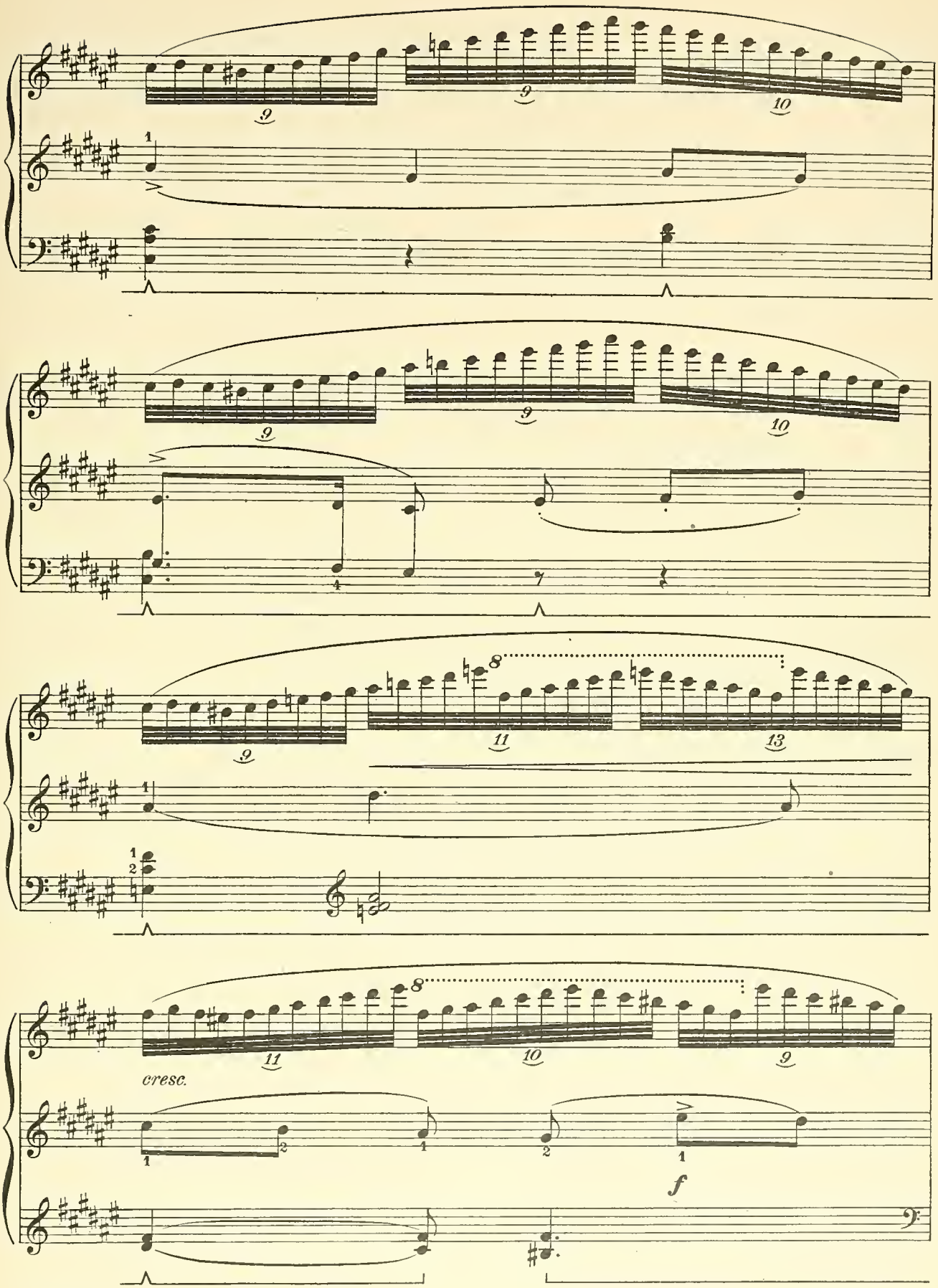
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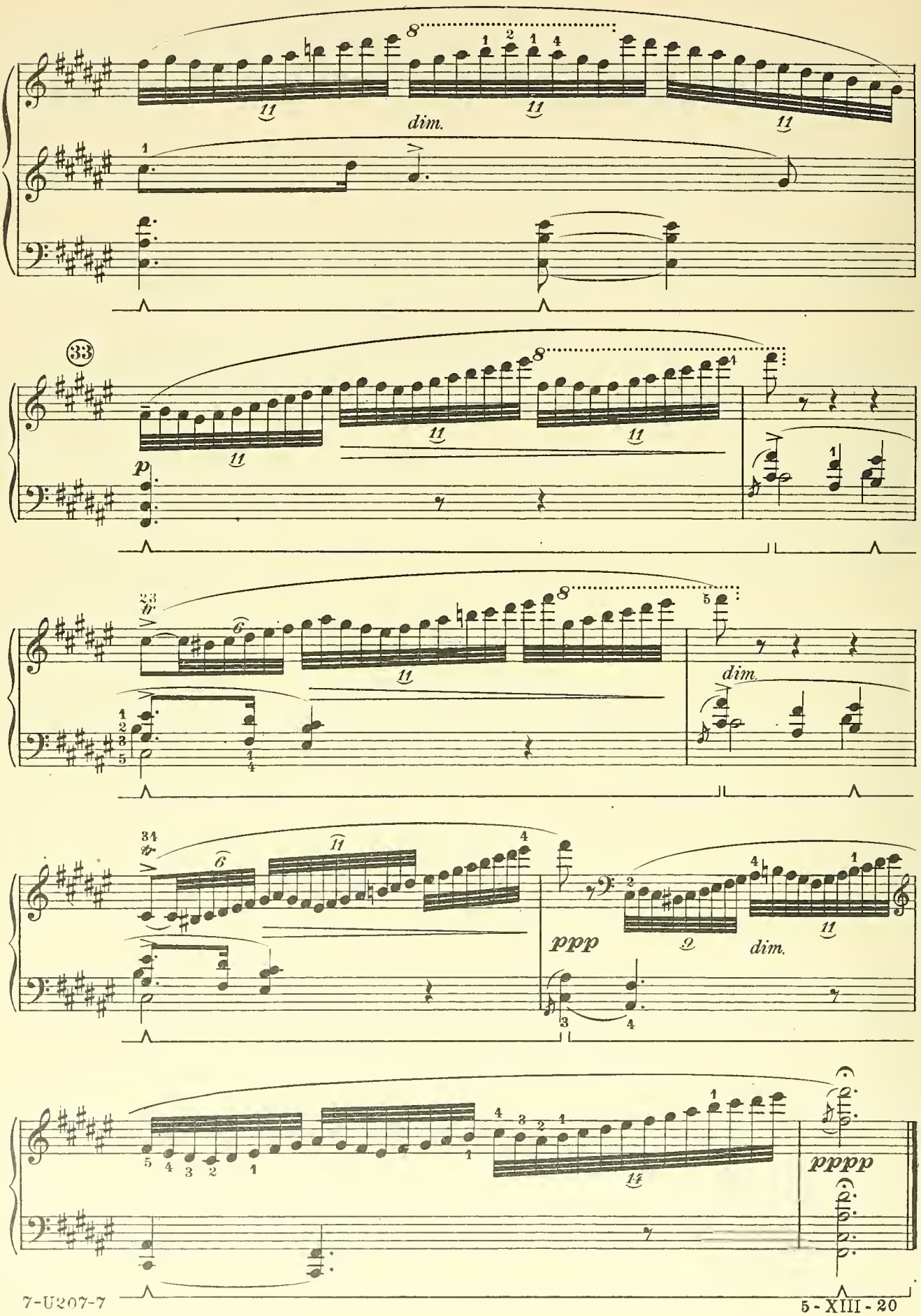
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CHAPTER EXAMINATION

1. Give the nationality and dates of birth and death of Chopin.

2. What was the character of the *étude* prior to Chopin's time? What changes did he make?

3. Into what two groups may Chopin's ETUDES be divided?

4. In the ETUDE, Op. 25, No. 8, in Double Sixths, what differences are apparent in Chopin's handling of the problem from that of certain predecessors?

5. Which part (right or left hand) is to be kept *legato?*

6. Give an outline of the form of the Arensky CAPRICE.

7. What comment does it suggest as to the methods of notating piano music?

8. What is the object of using three or more staves in piano music? Name some other pieces which employ three or more staves.

9. What is the necessity for slow practice with the left hand?

10. What in general were some of Chopin's technical theories?

Student Percentage

Examined by Date

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NEW YORK